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[556] holdings.¹⁰ Commerce also must have caused some inequality in wealth. Furthermore, it seems that the lands for distribution were not redistributed at certain intervals of time. Private property prevailed within the community, although the property title was vested in the community and outsiders were excluded from ownership. This internal organization of private property among community members allowed some concentration of land. From early times all these factors produced differences in wealth within the villages, but the communal ownership of land, always basic, maintained the solidarity of the villagers, as against outsiders.

[621] The Indian communities were provided with an adaptation of the system of government in Spanish townships:

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"From one to four Indian *regidores* and one or two Indian *alcaldes*, depending on the size of the pueblo, were to be chosen each year in the presence of the priest and the local *corregidor* (later subdelegate), and relieved during their term of office of tribute and personal services. The *alcaldes* shared jurisdiction with the hereditary native chief or *cacique*, were aided by one or more Indian *alguaciles*, sometimes collected the local tribute, and had authority to make arrests and punish minor offenses such as drunkenness and failure to attend mass."¹¹

175 The actual functioning of this system is documented for early times.¹²

624 With the Spanish conquest the higher strata of Indian society and the related culture disappeared, but the Spaniards also granted to the Indian nobles, mainly to the town chiefs (*caciques*), privileges which allowed them to survive for a long time as a privileged group within the Indian communities.

175 This surviving Indian nobility first had the prerogative of filling higher offices in town government. Conflict on this point arose very early because of the impoverishment of the Indian nobles and the commoners' reluctance to obey them.¹³ On the other hand we know that Indian nobles kept a great amount of wealth and power until the early nineteenth century.¹⁴ The scanty evidence as yet published suggests that the system by which Indian nobles controlled higher offices gradually gave way to a system where the ex-officers

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10. Zavala and Costello, 1939-45, passim; Humboldt, 1: 429-30.

11. Haring, 1947, 174.

12. Chávez Orozco, 1943, ch. 1.

13. Zurita, 1891, 100-108; 188-189; 198-199.

14. Humboldt, 1811, 1:422-3.

175 formed a council of elders who controlled
623 community affairs and the nomination of new officers.¹⁵

175 This is the system which seems to be
171 typical of Indian-Spanish towns in Middle
621 and South America.¹⁶ It has been best characterized by Tax for Guatemala,¹⁷ where secular and religious officials are arranged in a hierarchical sequence through which every man is supposed to pass. Those who have thus fulfilled their duties toward the community enter the category of elders and form a council which holds power and controls the giving of offices.

A basic trait in the political system of the Indian village community was the close interrelation of the religious and secular aspects of town organization by having civil officers perform some religious function or by considering certain religious offices prerequisite for the civil.

175 Native religion before the Spanish conquest was based on a number of gods representing the different natural elements, economic activities, and the social groups formed by kinship and the division of labor (clans, trades, towns, etc.). After the Spanish conquest, Catholicism was forced on the Indians and a Catholic priesthood replaced the native one. A syncretism of the Indian gods with similar Catholic saints occurred. This replacement or fusion of Indian gods with Catholic saints and also the preservation of pagan festivals by devoting them to the saints were acknowledged and even fostered by the Spanish missionaries.

175 Every Indian community was provided with a church, a priest, and a sexton. There were also two or three chanters and two *fiscales*, old men in charge of calling the Indians to religious services and instruction.¹⁸

175 Very important in this new religion were the festivals connected with the yearly cycle of Catholic ritual. They were organized by devout individuals who took care of a particular festival and assisted the priest. Civil officers also participated.

178 Part of the native religion not related to the Church rituals survived, because of the considerable community autonomy, mainly as private ceremonies or superstitions relating to technological or life cycle activities (sickness, for instance).

171 These aspects of unorganized religion

15. Chávez Orozco, 1943, Chapter 2.

16. For Peru, see Mishkin, 1946, 443-448.

17. Tax, 1937, especially 442-444. The question of land tenure, however, is not discussed. For this point see Wagley, 1961, 52-54.

18. Haring, 1947, 174.

473 the western and southern shore often have fields
[311] in the Sierra.

Two systems of land ownership—communal and private—prevail in most of modern Tarasca. Since the land reforms of 1915, the *ejido*, a third type of holding, has displaced most of the haciendas around the margins of the Sierra.

Since Spanish contact most of the Tarascan agricultural land has become private property of family heads. Even in the few remaining pueblos which claim complete communal ownership of their lands, a strong individualization of property has developed. The historical process of the shift from communal to private ownership is not clear. Late 18th-century documents on land disputes among the Tarascan pueblos indicate that at that time the communal system prevailed at least in the Sierra. The issuance of individual land titles may not have occurred until after the reforms of 1857. In the Sierra private landholders (*propietarios*) often possess one or more plots in the *plan*, and still others on the less fertile *laderas*. Size of individual holdings varies greatly, since land is purchasable. Normal holdings average 2 to 3 hectares per family. Traces of the communal concept exist in the minds of the modern proprietors. Although legally possible, there is little desire to sell land to nonmembers of the community. If such a transaction should arise, it usually must be approved by the town council.⁴⁸ Consequently, pueblo lands are kept intact. Moreover, individual holdings, especially those in the *plan*, are rarely enclosed, for after harvest the fields are used as communal pasture.⁴⁹ Accordingly, the final date for removal of crops and the first date for planting in unenclosed lands of each pueblo is communally regulated.

Vestiges of the ancient land system are retained in the special communal holdings found in most modern Tarascan villages. Five pueblos in La Cañada—Tanaquillo, Acachuén, Ichán, Tacuro, and Carapan—retain communal ownership of all lands, at least in name. Family heads are allotted one plot of *temporal* near the pueblo and another of *humedad* in the Sierra to the south and east. The individual allotments vary from 2 to 4

[623] ⁴⁸ The Tarascan town council is normally composed of the *representantes del pueblo* and his committee of six. The *representantes* deal with most internal affairs of the pueblo.

[351] ⁴⁹ Fences and ditches are used most frequently to divide cultivated lands from pasture and to separate individual holdings on the *laderas*, or slope land.